



Transcript of Hedy Schleifer's speech on April 20, 2010 at the TEDxTelAviv Conference

I feel really privileged to be here. I've cried, I've laughed, I've been profoundly touched and I feel really privileged to be alive. I'm grateful that I'm alive.

In 1944, my parents were in a concentration camp in Vichy, France. My mother engineered an escape. She actually got my father out. And my parents walked through the Alps. My mother was pregnant with me. And when they got to the Swiss border, the border was closed to refugees. My mother threw herself into Switzerland. Anything for her was better than going back to the hell she came from. And my father succeeded in smuggling himself a few days later. And in 1944, I was born.

Decades later, I'm sitting with my mother in an old aged home in Israel and I cannot bear to see her. She's sitting in a wheelchair. She doesn't know who I am. I feel guilty, I feel sad, I'm struggling, I'm angry. This is my hero. Why should she be here? And I realized that I'm not visiting her. I'm with my own emotions. And I make a decision; I'm going to cross the bridge to the world of my mother. I will leave the world where I am struggling and I will go and meet her and I will bring with me new eyes. And so I did, I came, I sat across from her and I crossed the bridge and I landed in her world and I looked at her. And she looked at me and in Yiddish she said, "Du bist meine tochter (you are my daughter)." And I started to cry and with her hands, she gently wiped my tears. She hadn't recognized me for months. Of course, I hadn't been there emotionally.

This miracle with my mother illustrates the *three invisible connectors* that I want to talk to you about today. *It is the relational space, the space. It is the bridge between the worlds, the bridge. And it is the encounter, human essence to human essence, the encounter.* These three invisible connectors, you know them, you live them. But you may never have framed them that way. And in working with couples for many, many years have come to see that those are the three invisible connectors.

Let me start by talking to you about the space. It is the Jewish Philosopher, Martin Buber, who said, "*Our relationship lives in the space between us. It*

doesn't live in me or in you or even in the dialogue between the two of us. It lives in the space that we live together." And he said, "That space is sacred space."

Now, if we don't know about the space. If we don't know how to take responsibility for the space we live together, we will actually pollute it. The way I polluted the space with my mother had polluted the space with my mother not because I was feeling my feelings. I polluted the space with my mother because I unconsciously put all these emotions in the middle between us unconsciously. When we don't know about the space, we polluted quite automatically a word, a look, a reaction, a withdrawal, a criticism, a judgment. We put it there unconsciously. And the space becomes uncomfortable.

And when the space is uncomfortable, we react to the discomfort in the space and the space becomes more uncomfortable. And slowly but surely, discomfort after discomfort, the space becomes dangerous and then we react to the danger in the space. And how do we react? Some of us react by exploding our energy. We talk louder, we shout, we say many words, we're in your face. Some of us react to the danger in the space by constricting, hiding, withdrawing our energy. And once those two reactions come together as a reaction to the danger in the space, the danger grows and now we are reacting together to the pollution and danger we co-created in the relational space.

What shall we do? How do we take responsibility for the space between us, which is sacred as says Martin Buber. Here comes the metaphor of the bridge. We take responsibility for the space between us by crossing the bridge to the world of the other and bringing our full presence on the other side. How do we do it?

First, sit down. Take a deep breath. Put your feet on the ground. Allow yourself to get to the present moment. Align yourself with here and now. Know that you are alive. Be grateful for this moment of your life right now. That already is a very important beginning for your journey across the bridge. And then, you begin to consciously and deliberately walk the bridge, slipping the rubber band that pulls you back to your prejudices, your story, and your identity, who you think you are your feelings, your emotions, whatever it is in your world. All you take with you across the bridge is a little plastic bag transparent with a passport and a visa.

The reason it is to be transparent, you cannot bring anything of yours to the other side of the bridge. And when you've landed on the other side, what do you do? You listen. You listen with an open heart. You listen with new eyes. It is Marcel Proust, the French writer who said, *"The adventure of life is not about discovering new landscape. The adventure of life is seeing the old ones with new eyes."* And you bring your new eyes and your open heart and your generosity of

spirit and you listen as if you're learning a new language, a new music, a new rhythm. You listen by repeating the words. I hear you say, "Have I got you?" And you learn, you learn about the landscape in this other world. And so, what can happen on the other side?

What happens on the other side is the encounter. Now what is the encounter? On a biological level, the encounter is the resonance between two brains. The relation that neurobiologist called this resonance 'The brain bridge'. Two limbic systems that resonate together. The seat of our emotions beginning to resonate together and relational neurobiologist have found that when they risk this resonance between two brains, our central nervous system begins to calm down because they've also discovered that our brain is the only organ inside of us that doesn't regulate from within. It regulates on the outside through another brain.

We need each other for self regulation. We can only regulate through the other, through the eyes of the other, through that resonance. And what happens then is very interesting because 10 years ago, approximately relational neurobiologist discovered those mere neurons that we have in our brain, our capacity for compassion, for empathy, for deep, deep understanding of the other. And during the encounter, these mere neurons become very alive. And what happens then? New neural pathways begin to form in the brain, new neural pathways that give us the capacity to be in relationship because the brain has been found to have an enormous plasticity. It can change at any time during our lifetime.

And so this new neural pathways that are formed in our brain give us a chance to become more relationally intelligent and more relationally mature. So that is the encounter in the biological sense.

But in another domain, it is harder to define what the encounter is. It is the meeting of two full human presences or two human essences or the life force in each person or the meeting of two souls. And what is that life force? What is the human essence?

My father has a story about that. My father had the largest collection of Yiddish stories in the universe and he loved to tell them and he laughed harder than anyone when he told his stories. And this story is about Mr. Goldberg, the tailor. So, somebody came to get a suit from Mr. Goldberg, the tailor. And he tries on the suit and he says, "Mr. Goldberg, this suit looks very strange. This sleeve doesn't fit at all." And Mr. Goldberg looks very seriously and he said, "You're right, for that sleeve, you have to hold your hand like that, okay?" Man says, "You know the other sleeve doesn't fit at all. Look at it." Mr. Goldberg looks at it and says, "You know, you're completely right. For that sleeve, you hold your hands like that and you put this shoulder like this, okay?" "But what about the right leg? The right leg looks very strange. What about it?" And Mr. Goldberg says, "You're right, you just have to put your foot a little bit inside like that."

"What about this one?" He says, "With that one, you put your foot like this."

Well now, the suit was fine and the man comes out of the tailor store and as he is walking in the street, this couple comes by and the woman says to her husband, "What an amazing tailor, a man in this condition, the suit fits him perfectly." Well, this is us. We are in this suit. We walk around in the suit because we've adapted to our life. And we don't even know that this is a suit, a survival suit. We know that this is us.

For example, if I adapted by being withdrawn and cold and really distant, I think this is me inside the suit. Is our human essence intact? Inside of our survival adaptation, we are our essence. And coming over the bridge allows our spirit to be nourished and this transformation to happen from the survival suit to our true human essence. It is in being with each other that our essence becomes revealed. And so it reminds me of this wonderful saying, "I used to be different and now I am the same."

I started with a story about my mother. I'd like to tell you one now about grandson, Leo. I was in Istanbul with Leo and we were in bed, snuggling and watching a movie. And at the end of the movie, Leo looked at me and he said, "Bubbe (Grandma), I love you." And I said, "I love you too, Leo." And he said, "No, I love you." And I said, "Sure sweaty, you love me and I love you." He said, "No bubbe, *I LOVE YOU.*" And then I understood, he didn't want me to deflect his love. He wanted me to step over the bridge to come to him and take in the pure essential love he was giving me. And so, I did, I looked at him. I took him in. I let what he was giving me in that moment penetrate and I said, "Leo, I hear you say you love me." And his face just shone. He was teaching me that it takes courage to be connected.

I'd like to share with you one of my favorite quotes by the Sufi Poets, Rumi of the 13th Century who said, "*Beyond right thinking and beyond wrong thinking, there is a field. I will meet you there.*" I have a dream. I envisioned 19 million couples honoring the three invisible connectors, honoring the space between them, crossing the bridge to each other and encountering each other human essence to human essence. It is enormously important to me because our children grow in the space between us. The space between the couple is the playground of the child. And when we know how to honor that space and make it sacred, our children can blossom in sacred space.

And I have a date in mind, November 11th, 2012, International Crossing the Bridge Day. It isn't just for couples. It is for human beings and it is for nations. I envision the time when nations will know that the space between them is sacred space; that there is a bridge to cross to know the culture of the other and that we can encounter each other, human essence to human essence. Beyond right thinking and beyond wrong thinking, there is a field...I will meet you there.